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ABSTRACT

This paper discusses the outcomes of two intervention models designed to prevent students with disabilities from dropping out of school in Finland. The first model, the "Creating Own Career" model, is based on the main ideas of the City as School projects. The model is designed to emphasize young peoples' own motivation, self-development, and responsibility for his/her own life. Much of the learning happens outside of school during work-based learning. The second model is a voluntary extra year of compulsory schooling. Interviews with 97 students who completed an extra year of compulsory schooling and 45 students who participated in the Creating Own Career model indicate that the bridge model, the extra year of comprehensive school, seems to be very effective in encouraging students to pursue postsecondary education. The majority of students were still involved in further education almost one year after the project and the unemployment rate did not differ from the average at this age group. The Creating Own Career model did not seem to be as effective in terms of motivating students to pursue further education, however, it did encourage pupils to complete their compulsory studies. (Contains 22 references.) (CR)

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TWO MODELS FOR PREVENTING STUDENTS WITH SPECIAL NEEDS FROM DROPPING OUT OF EDUCATION IN FINLAND

Special Education World Congress 2000, Research, Policy, and Practice: Building on Global Achievements, April 2 - 5, 2000, Vancouver, BC, Canada.

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INTRODUCTION

Dropping out of education as one indicator of failure at school has been under general discussion over 1990's in many arenas (e.g. OECD, 1998). Numerous studies has shown that pupils with special needs are in high risk of dropping out and leaving school without finishing their studies in particular in post-compulsory schooling (e.g. Blackorby & Wagner, 1996; Jahnukainen, forthcoming; Neel et al, 1988). However, these findings are not new but their meaning is becoming more and more significant in today society than some decades ago. In Finland, as elsewhere, competition of jobs has increased and the connection between education and employment has become more apparent. In today's society fewer jobs are available for uneducated people. Lack of education is a clear risk for unemployment and entering to low paid, short-term jobs without any career possibilities. Further, when the great majority of the age group will obtain at least secondary education (see table 1) the lack of education might lead to born of so called "new educational lower class" (Coleman & Husen, 1985; see also Kivirauma, 1997), which again may serve as a step towards for deepening social exclusion (figure 1).

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However, it should be noted that the lack of education is not alone the cause for social education process. The social exclusion should be defined as a process of deepening disadvantage, where cumulative risk, if they are not treated, might lead to total social exclusion (stage 5 in figure 1). From this point of view, it could be argued that special education when working preventing the failure at school and dropping out of education, may also serve as a tool for preventing larger social problems.

From Finnish point of view we have clear evidence that special education works at least quite satisfactorily during compulsory schooling, but however, the special care will end too categorically right after leaving compulsory schooling (Jahnukainen, 1997; 1999b). It

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might be useful to link to the idea of *Education for All* to post compulsory education as well. It is not enough that we concentrate to create inclusive school only, at the same time we should try to create equal possibilities for everybody to join in post school society; in other words we should be more worried about creating inclusive society. We need more efforts to prepare our students to confront the further education and labour market. We should build a continuing service model for the transition process from the compulsory schooling to the further education.

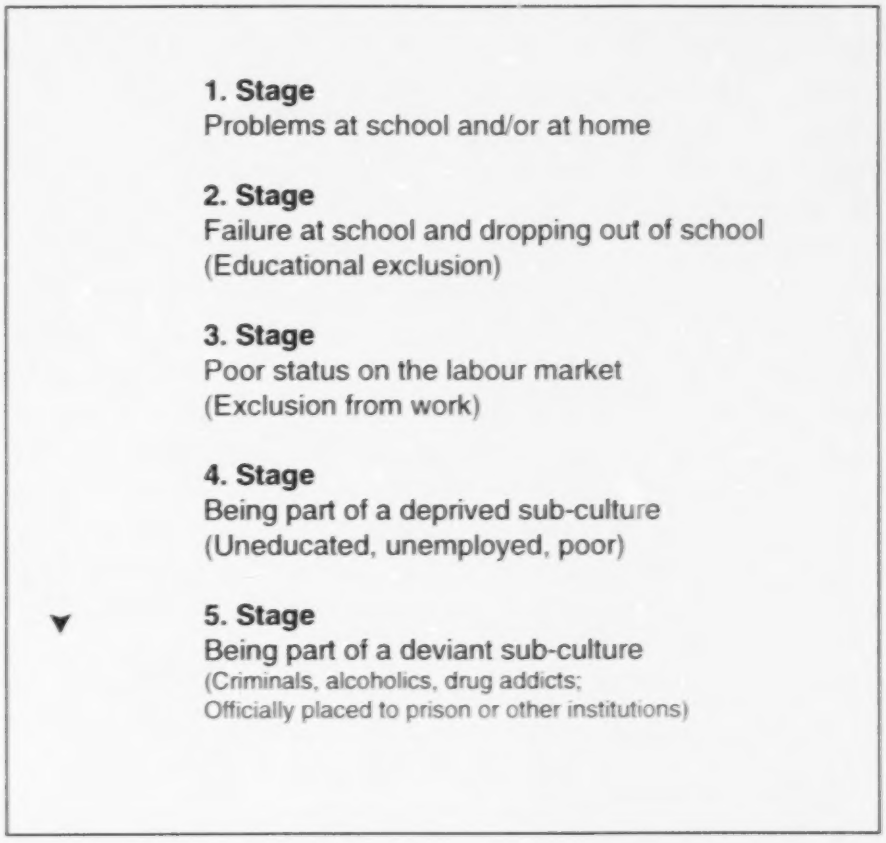
1. Stage
Problems at school and/or at home
2. Stage
Failure at school and dropping out of school
(Educational exclusion)
3. Stage
Poor status on the labour market
(Exclusion from work)
4. Stage
Being part of a deprived sub-culture
(Uneducated, unemployed, poor)
5. Stage
Being part of a deviant sub-culture
(Criminals, alcoholics, drug addicts;
Officially placed to prison or other institutions)

Figure 1. Hierarchy of social exclusion (sources: Jyrkämä, 1986; Takala, 1992). Adapted from Jahnukainen (forthcoming)

DROPPING OUT OF EDUCATION IN FINLAND

In Finland we have a 9-year comprehensive school system, that is compulsory for whole age group 7 - 16, including pupils with special needs. Children with severe developmental disorders will begin comprehensive schooling one year earlier and leave it one year later. During school year 1997 – 1998 there was little over 4000 pupils involved

this 11-year, prolonged schooling, which is about 0.7 per cent of whole age group. Roughly 103,000 pupils of comprehensive school age receive some kind of special education, which is close to 18 per cent of the age group. For most of the pupils with special needs the comprehensive schooling is arranged with the help of part-time special education, that may be given to any comprehensive school pupil without administratively transferring him/her to special education. The proportion of this kind of special educational provision has grown rapidly from late 60's and has been around 80 per cent of all special education pupils last twenty years. (Happonen, 2000; Jahnukainen, 2000b).

Drop-out rate of comprehensive schooling is very low; only a little more than 100 pupils of whole age group (less than 0.03 %) leave school every year without completing their compulsory studies (Laukkanen & Lindström, 1996). However, it is evident that there are far more pupils who are leaving compulsory schooling with very limited academic skills.

The general participation rate in post compulsory education is very high in Finland (see table 1). Almost all comprehensive school leavers send application to the further education and only 7 % leave outside any kind of education. For many, being outside further education is a temporal phase for the reason that they have not been accepted into the field they have prioritized in their further education career plans. According statistics from year 1995, 82,4 % of the age group 25 – 34 in Finland has obtained at least upper secondary education (Statistics Finland, 1999a). Further, statistical prognosis shows that even 94 per cent of young people in 1995 will obtain at least secondary qualification before age of 40 (Statistics Finland, 1998).

Table 1. Percentage of age group enrolled to education at the age of 17 in several countries (Sources: OECD, 1996; 1996).

	Germany	UK	USA	Finland
Ratio of enrollment	93	74	78	92

However, although dropping out of further education in Finland is not a large problem in general, it is a far more typical for students with special needs. According to different investigations the admission or the acceptance to further studies is not the key problem, but the former students of special classes, especially the former pupils of the classes for emotionally and behaviorally disordered, are in highest risk to interrupt their studies in secondary level (Jahnukainen, 1996; 1999b; forthcoming). Although the state has

quaranteed since 1988 that every young person with special education needs will have place in further studies, hardly any efforts have been put in building transition programs for these students. Also the vocational special education is available mainly for those with most severe intellectual or physical disabilities.

Instead of large national transition programs, there has been developed many kind of local projects during last decade for young people who left outside the further education and working life after completing their comprehensive schooling. They are focused in general level on preventing social exclusion and marginalisation among young people. That's why most of the projects are outside school projects and they give typically only training for working life, although there is a need for gaining the academic skills, self-determination and career development.

BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

In this paper I will present follow-up results from two programs working for preventing the educational exclusion in Finland. These programs were selected because they work in connection of comprehensive school system, although they have been influenced by several outside school projects working with young people at risk for social exclusion. Both projects have same kind of clients but they are working in different phase of the compulsory schooling: *Creating own career* during last years of upper comprehensive school and *10th form* after completing the compulsory schooling. Thus the 10th form leavers are mainly one year (17 years old) older than Creating own career leavers (16 years old) are. The *Creating own career* model based on small group idea, where is always another adult working with special teacher as a multi-professional team (social worker or youth worker). The second adult is available only in some of the 10th form classes.

For both of these groups use of new models of learning and teaching play very important role, because high proportion of the participants have had problems in traditional way of schooling. According a survey a higher proportion of the 10th form students have been clients of some kind of special education during their comprehensive school years than the comprehensive school pupils in average (Jahnukainen, 1998). Especially the pupils of Creating own career –project have typically a long history of serious difficulties at school as well outside school life beginning their early childhood.

Creating own career –project

The first model is a project called as "Creating own career" based on main ideas of "The City as School" -projects (Die Stadt als Schule) in Berlin and New York. The pedagogy

is based on ideas of alternative learning methods and productive learning, which has several common features with Dewey's and Freinet's theories of learning. The target is to emphasise young people's own motivation, self-development and responsibility for his/her own life. A great part of the learning will happen outside school during work-based learning. In Finnish solution more pressure is gained to the individual educational plans and also to the career development and also experiential learning methods are used.

In Finland this model was originally grounded as an independent project in lead of Mannerheim League for Child Welfare. Since 1997 the pedagogical idea has been adopted and developed by an "Creating own career" -association, which is a member of the International Network of Productive Schools (INEPS). The status of these classes is not clear in our educational system but they are working in several localities throughout the whole country partly founded by projects of European Social Foundations. Most often they are used as an alternative for the traditional special class treatment for EBD-pupils during the upper comprehensive school level (form 7th to 9th grade of Finnish comprehensive school). The intaking process and also the pedagogical methods vary between localities.

In this study we have pupils from three localities from southern Finland. The project in town of *Riihimäki* is the oldest project and it is a joint project between local education administration and local social office and child welfare. It has been grounded for those who already has dropped out school and are in serious social exclusion risk. It has also been used as a substitute for a placement to reformatory institutions. It is evident that this group has had more profound adjustment problems than the other group in this sample. The pupils can enter to the project anytime during the upper comprehensive stage (form 7 to 9). The *Vantaa* –project take pupils only for during the last year of comprehensive schooling. A lot of pressure was gained to the experiential education and this project had a possibility to co-operate with other programs situated under a coalition called as "The Open Learning Center". The *Helsinki* -project is the youngest one and its intaking capacity is far too low for the needs of whole city population. That's why they have possibilities to select those pupils who would be best fit to this kind of learning for the two last years of comprehensive school.

<u>10th form</u>

The second model is the voluntary extra year of compulsory schooling, which has been arranged since 1977. This is a model that is trying to work like a bridge from the compulsory schooling to the further education during one year. It is voluntary for pupils, but it is also voluntary for municipalities, and thus not available in every town. However, in largest town the need for this kind of education increased during the 1990's recession

years. For example in Helsinki, there have been over five hundred 10th form students in 1996. In whole country of the compulsory school leaving population about 4 per cent (about 2500 pupils) enter to 10th form in 1996 (Statistics Finland, 1998).

The curriculum of the extra year was traditionally based on the repetition of the curriculum of the upper stage of comprehensive school. It could be said that it offers a "new chance" for those students failured during the compulsory schooling. During 1990's there has been made a lot of progressive developing work concerning the learning/teaching methods. For example in City of Vantaa, where this study sample was gathered, the education in 10th form is based mostly on individual education plans (IEP) made for every student. The IEP's consists of academic studies, work experience periods and periods of participating in courses of the vocational institutions (Jahnukainen, 1999a). This model is also legitimized in new curriculum for 10th form education by Finnish National Board of Education (National Board of Education, 1999).

Method

Objectives

The target of this study was to examine the long-term outcomes of two intervention models for youth at risk. The study questions were: 1) how these young people have been entered to further education and labour market after leaving the project, and 2) what is these individuals own experiences of the benefits of participating the intervention.

Data gathering process

The data was gathered using telephone interviews in average 10 months after leaving the project. Concerning some earlier leavers of *Creating own career* -project there is information available for a longer period. Most of the interviews were made by their former teachers, because it was thought that this would be the most effective and comfortable way to catch these people for a study. All of the former pupils of *Creating own career* –projects left before spring 1997 were catch for interview. Due to the method in use, only 62 % of the spring 1996 10th form leavers in Vantaa were caught for the study, because all of the teachers were not available as interviewers after 10 months. However, there is no other reason to assume that the sample in questions would be selectively formed.

Further education

In figure 2 is presented the flow of students from *10th from* and from the *Creating own career* –project to further education as a process. When the participation of the former pupils of these models are compared in different phases of the process it is evident that the 10th form students have been more successful to entering to the further education. When compared to the available statistical information it seems that 10th form leavers are managing only slightly inferior than the comprehensive school leaving age group in average. The difference between the two intervention models may be partly due the fact that 10 form is a voluntarily model: these young people are more clearly motivated to continuing their studies instead of entering to labour market (Jahnukainen, 1998). *Creating own career* leavers are also about one year younger and some of them entered to 10th form education to spend one more year to exploring their career aspirations.

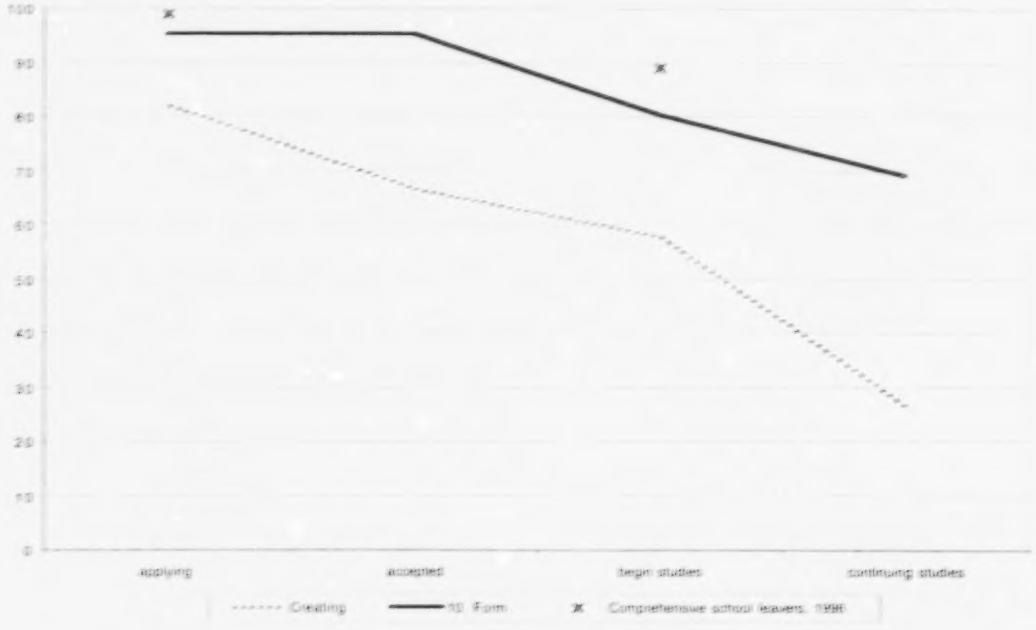

Figure 2. The process of entering to further education (16 + secondary education). Differences between *Creating own career* group and *10th Form* group are statistically significant (chi square test) at .05 level (applying) and .001 level (accepted, beginning and continuing). Information about the comprehensive school leavers is available only concerning applying and beginning (Source: Statistics Finland, 1998).

Even though the enrollment rate to further education seem to be at quite satisfactory level, these former at risk groups differ highly from the average when compared with the educational pathway – selecting the academic or the vocational route. When over half of the comprehensive school leavers enter to senior secondary school (Finnish high school, *gymnasium*) only one of four of *10th formers* and less than one of twenty from *Creating own career* –project has chosen that more academically oriented and university leading route (table 2). On the contrary, over half of the *10th form* and *Creating own career* - leavers have selected the vocational route (vocational and professional education institutions) compared to about one of three comprehensive leavers.

Table 2. Enrollment rate (%) of the *10th formers* and *Creating own career* –project leavers to the further educational institutions compared to the Finnish comprehensive school leavers 1996 (Source: Statistics Finland, 1998.)

	Comprehensive	10th Form	Creating...
Senior secondary schools	55	25	4
Vocational and professional education institutions	34	58	53

However, the situation may change during next years at least in terms of the enrollment rate in both groups. According to students future plans (figure 7, see Appendix), most are going to participate further education in near future, although the *Creating own career* –leavers are still more often oriented entering to working life than *10th form* leavers. When splitted by gender, there found to be no statistically significant difference between males, but Creating *own career* females tend to be more oriented to working life than *10th form* females also in near future ($p < .01$, chi square test).

Working life

Entering to further education seems to be the main goal for most of the school leaving young people in Finland. However, there is also that kind of young people, who want to work some time after compulsory schooling and earn some money before entering to education again. This seem to be quite typical strategy for Creating own career –leavers. 10th form students are mainly oriented to continue their studies. However, it is not easy to get a job without any vocational qualification, although the unemployment among young people has decreased from the deepest recession years. When in 1993 over 30 % of 20 - 24 year old young people in the labour market were unemployed (Santamäki-Vuori &

Sauramo, 1995) this was the situation for 25 % in 1996 and little under 20 % in 1998 (Statistics Finland, 1999b). However, among the youngest age group (15 to 19 years old) the unemployment rate was still over 30 in 1998 (Aho, 1999).

In figure 3 the ratio of unemployed persons in both study groups is presented together with the available monthly information about the 15 to 24-years old Finns. The trend seem to be the same for every group: the unemployment ratio was highest just after the end of school year (June) and it decreased just when the school year was started in autumn. However, it is clear that for the Creating own career –leavers the access to working life has been most problematic during the follow-up time from June 1996 to April 1997. On the contrary, the 10th form leavers have succeeded even better than young people in average to enter to labour market have. Only during the first months just after leaving the school the ratio of unemployment was higher than in average.

When the unemployment ratio is examined using gender distributions, it seems that in both groups the unemployment was more typical for females. Further, for the Creating own career –females the increase of unemployment ratio is rapid after dropping out of the secondary education. However, the boys and the girls from Creating own career are all of the time more unemployed than boys and girls leaving the 10th form or in general (figure 2)[1]. One possible explanation is that there are fewer jobs available for young female. It is also possible that the young female persons a more oriented to enter to education in following years after leaving compulsory schooling and they are waiting for that possibility.

[1] This trend is present also when the youngest age group (15 to 19 years Finns) is examined using year quartiles (Aho, 1999). However, there is no monthly information available for purposes of this study.

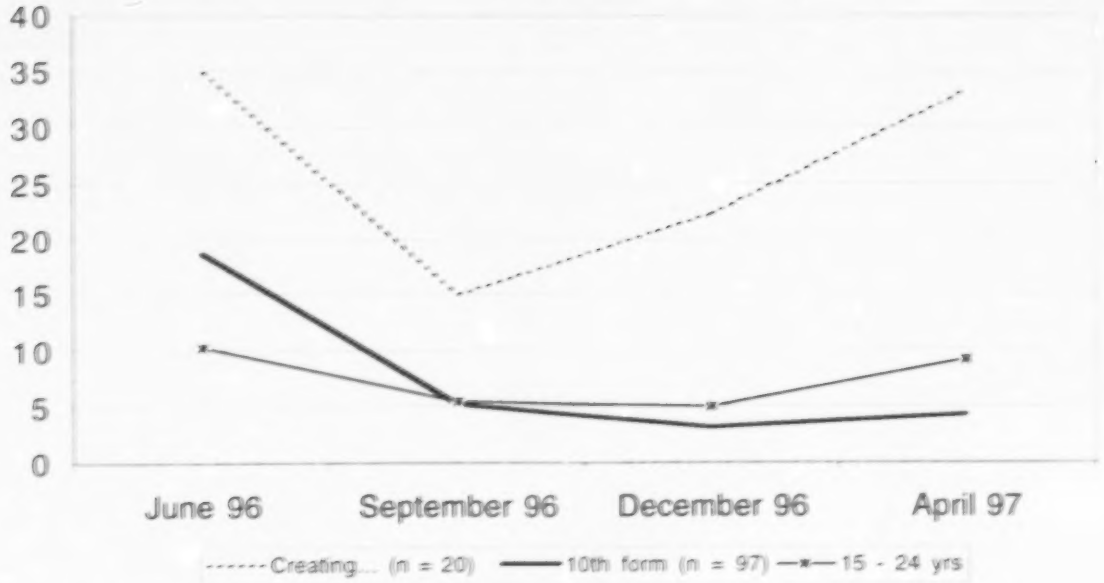

Figure 3. Ratio of unemployed (%) in study groups compared to 15 to 24-years old Finns from June 1996 to April 1997 (Source: Statistics Finland, 2000). Differences between *Creating own career* group and *10th Form* group are non-significant in June and September and significant at .05 level in December and .001 level in April (chi square test, DF = 1).

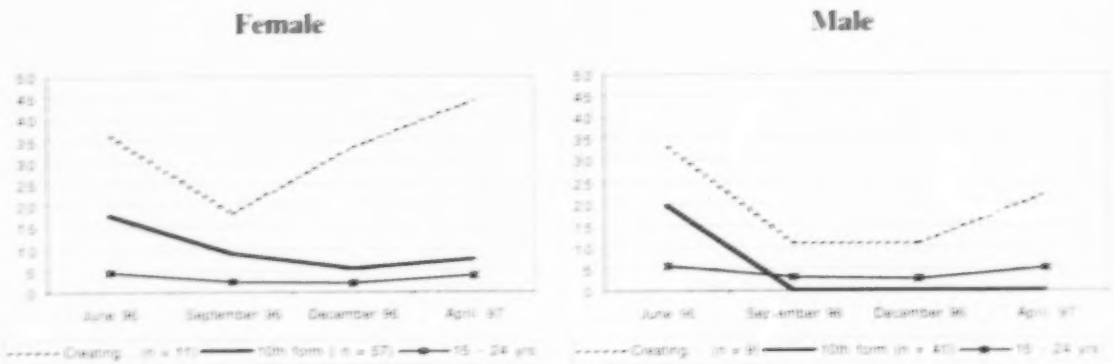

Figure 4. Ratio of unemployed (%) by gender in study groups compared to 15 – 24 years Finns from June 1996 to April 1997 (Source: Statistics Finland, 2000). Differences between *Creating own career* and *10th Form* females are significant in December at .05 level and in April .01 level. Between males the differences are significant only in April at .05 level (chi square test, DF = 1).

Student evaluation of the experienced benefits of the intervention

Recently, the *consumer view* or the *client orient* perspective has been used widely as a tool for evaluation of the outcome of special education in (e.g. Guterman, 1995; Habel et al, 1999; Jahnukainen, 2000a). In this study the participants were asked to answer *yes, no* or *I don't know* to two claims concerning the intervention model in question. The claims were "*10th form/Creating own career* was the right choice for me" and that "the 10th form helps me to define my future plans".

The general impression of the experienced benefits using this kind of evaluation method is very positive. The great majority of the respondents in both study groups answered *yes* for both claims (figures 5 and 6). However, it seems that little more *Creating own career* –leavers were at least unsure about the benefits than former *10th formers*. It seems also that in both groups the experienced benefit for the personal future planning was not realized as well as the general decision to participate the program. One explanation for the *no* answers from *10th form* leavers concerning the future planning is that for some of them the 10th year was only a second possibility, they already knew were they want to enter but they have not succeeded to get accepted there earlier.

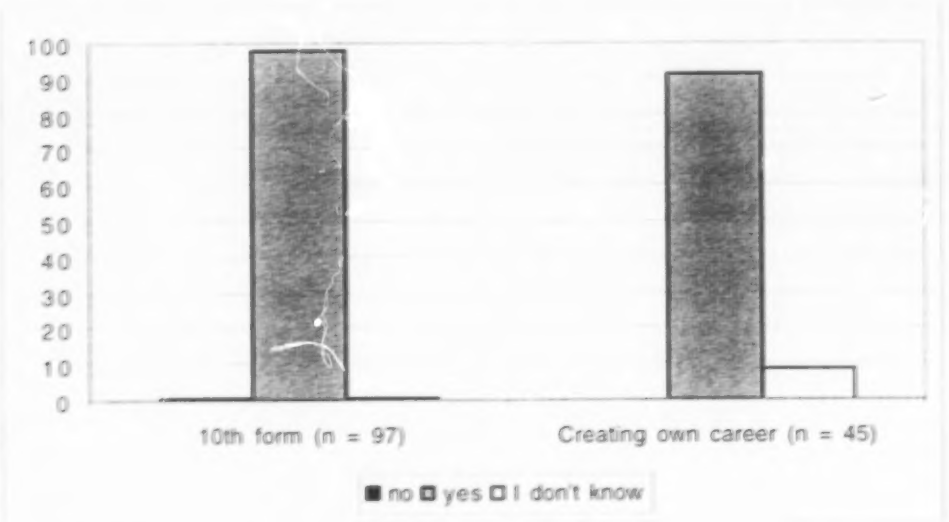

Figure 5. The satisfaction distribution (%) based on answers to a claim: "*10th form/Own career was* ***the right choice*** *for me*". Distribution difference between school models is significant at .05 level (chi square test).

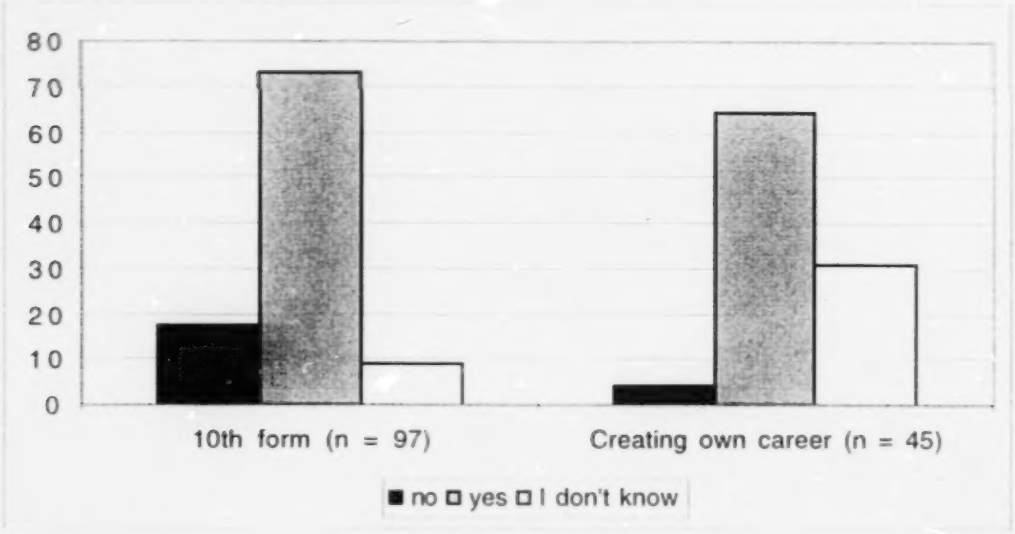

Figure 6. The satisfaction distribution (%) based on answers to a claim: "*10th form/Own career helped me with* ***my future planning***". Distribution difference between school models is significant at .01 level (chi square test).

Discussion

It is obvious that the transition from the compulsory schooling to the further education is not easy for all young people. If we assume that it is useful to guide whole age group into the upper secondary education, we need also different, more flexible pathways to confront the heterogeneity of these students. The special needs won't end when the compulsory schooling is over.

In this study two models working for preventing the dropping out of education in Finland were evaluated. The follow-up findings shows that the bridge model, extra year of comprehensive school seem to be very effective if we are examining the entering to the further education: majority of students were still involved in further education after almost one year finishing the project and the unemployment rate did not differ from the average at this age group. *Creating own career* –projects does not seem to be so effective in terms of pushing the students to the further education. The reason could be that these pupils have even more difficult background and they are at least one year younger than

10th form students are. They may need more time and efforts to enter to the further education. However, the valuable effect of the *Creating own career* –project is that these pupils have completed their compulsory studies, which is the basic requirement to the upper secondary education.

The Finnish school system seems to work quite effectively until the end of compulsory schooling at least if the low drop out rate is used as an indicator. However it is evident that more efforts is needed in developing the transition strategies for pupils with special need to post compulsory schooling. Otherwise there will be a danger of broadening diversification to educated high class and uneducated low class, especially due the fact that nowadays there is only few work opportunities available for young people without any kind of vocational qualification. Thus preventing dropping out of education also at secondary level may serve as prevention for broader social exclusion in post school society. It seems also evident that alternative ways of schooling are needed at least for a small proportion of comprehensive age pupils, who are easily disaffected on academics only. The students satisfaction in this study based mostly on their experiences of the use of nontraditional learning methods, which were not restricted inside school only. With these kinds of alternative, flexible solutions based on individual quidance it may be possible to bridge the narrow gap between comprehensive and secondary schooling.

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APPENDIX

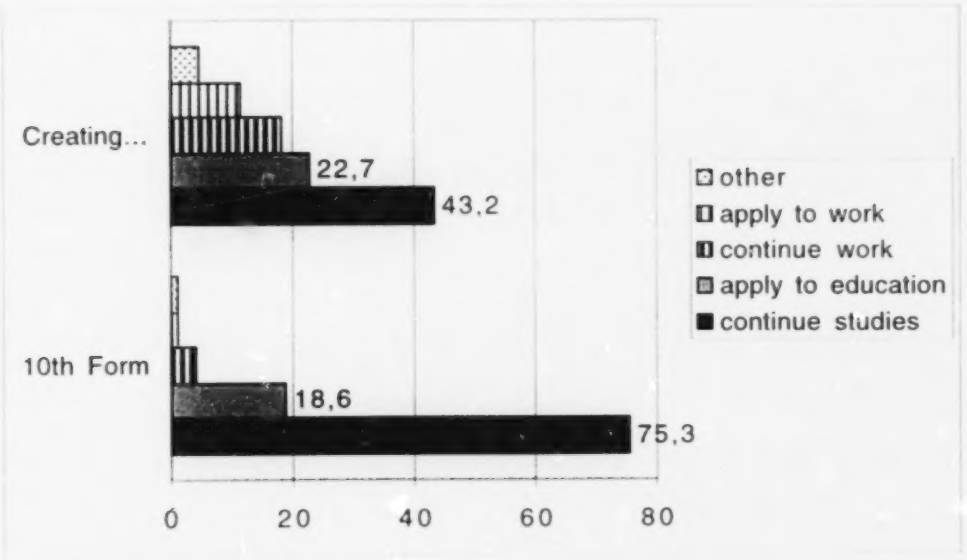

Figure 7. The future plans by intervention model. Distribution difference between *Creating own career* group (n = 44) and *10th Form* group (n = 97) is statistically significant at .001 level (chi square test).